

Commissioner Phil Giudice  
Mass DOER  
Boston, MA

Dear Commissioner Giudice:

Please accept my comments on the development of new regulations and policies governing the use of biomass for renewable energy in Massachusetts. I write to you from two perspectives: (1) as a former member of the Russell Planning Board that unanimously voted in favor of a site plan review for Russell Biomass LLC five years ago, and (2) as a life-long Russell resident terribly concerned that we may lose an industrial project that can return our community to financial security. On a personal note, my father worked at Texon and sent my brother and me to college; my husband worked at Westfield River during college, my brother worked at Westfield River during law school, my youngest son worked at Westfield River and my oldest son worked at Texon. My sons chose to raise their families in Russell and worry that taxes and lack of jobs will force the next generation to settle elsewhere.

I want to stress that my desire for the proposed biomass plant is in no way ignoring the question of health and environmental impacts. In spite of the town's financial condition, I do not put economics ahead of public health or safety and, my oldest son and his family, who live directly across from the proposed plant, are avid environmentalists who canoe and kayak the river frequently.

It is apparent that the biomass developers have bent over backwards to work with, and respond to, many town concerns and, in many instances, have been treated with incredible disrespect. When concern was expressed regard burning C & D, the developers agreed to remove it from their wood fuel supply.

When opponents, who have told downright lies (i.e. babies will die and fumes will cause severe respiratory problems), attacked the proposed plant in every conceivable way imaginable, and challenged the state's approval of the draft environmental impact report, the developers made it financially possible for the town to interview and hire an outside consultant to review the company's environmental studies and reports. Russell Biomass had no say and no contact with Alternative Resources Inc., the consultant firm hired in 2007. The report by ARI concluded, "with the exception of the traffic safety and traffic noise, no significant and permanent environmental impacts should be expected from this project".

In response to repeated opponent concerns about air quality, the biomass developers, met three times with the American Lung Association. The result of those meetings was an initiative whereby Russell Biomass commissioned a woodstove comparison study which illustrated that the concentration of particulate matter, about which the ALA expressed concern, would be far less from the power plant stack than from a home wood stove. The company then put together a "freebie" offer in which Russell Biomass would exchange new, clean-burning wood pellet stoves for older wood stoves at no cost for up to twenty Russell residents who now heat with non-pellet wood stoves. Since the comparison study illustrated that the particulate emissions from the plant stack would be less than one old fashioned wood stove, the company's plan demonstrates that

our air quality in Russell, particularly in wintertime, would actually improve as a result of the wood exchange program.

I do not have the expertise to comment on the forest sustainability issue except to say that there are many foresters and loggers in Russell who have family forest land acreage, including our family. I know that the proposed biomass plant will be using a majority of landscaping and other discarded wood for their fuel and that western Massachusetts has abundant forestlands. I have also heard that new regulations could mistakenly prevent the proper management of the family woodlands I mention.

I also cannot comment on the carbon dioxide issue except to say that in Russell, we are reading conflicting reports from many sources about the matter of carbon neutrality. I accompanied other town residents on a bus trip to Portsmouth, NH when the Schiller plant inaugurated its revamped coal-fired power plant as a wood-fired plant. Public Service of New Hampshire gave a slide show presentation that, to me, made a great deal of good sense. Some of the points included benefits for New Hampshire's forest industry, keeping the money in NH instead of spending on coal coming from out of the state and out of the region, and the environmental preference for wood over coal. I know the recent Manomet study seemed to indicate the reverse was true but now I have read so many conflicting reports and assessments by other organizations with a concern about our environment, that I am not yet clear on what is the reality. I just think that when my grandchildren reach my age, they will be glad that this biomass plant was a good fit for our area.

All I know is that Russell and the region would benefit greatly from the proposed Russell Biomass project. I know that a statewide initiative, organized by the opponents, tried to put a citizen's question on the ballot for November that would prevent all biomass plants from being built. This has been cleverly engineered by a very small group of people who were able to convince uninformed people, in shopping centers and other public areas, that biomass plants will result in cutting down all the trees in the area. This doesn't make sense to me because we would have heard about this problem in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont where there are numerous biomass plants. My neighbors and friends in Russell, who have lived here and made their living from the four paper mills, strongly object to the political turn that renewable energy has taken in response to the opponents' ballot initiative. Is this where the energy future of the state is headed? Can't responsible state governmental officials like you do the right thing? It would be a terrible thing if all the politics involved in biomass opposition, made it impossible for this plant to be built. We NEED the benefits, both financial and environmental, that this plant will bring to our town. PLEASE consider the humble common man and don't make provisions that would prohibit our town and the entire area from enjoying the peace of mind that comes from job security, and recreational benefits and an average of \$1.3 million in tax revenues to Russell for twenty years!

Thank you for your consideration of my requests. I applaud you for tackling such a politically charged issue.

Respectfully yours,

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